

Today, many people would say that newspapers are a dying breed. However, the news will never die out, but the way we deliver it will constantly change as new technology develops.

The New York Times is not only one of the most prestigious newspapers in the industry; it is also an ever-evolving medium that reaches its audience in a variety of ways. With the Internet being a major factor in what has caused journalism to become more interactive, the New York Times has added many Flash news packages to go along with their stories. Also, based on factors such as content, technical skills and usability, mainstream media can enhance the journalistic quality of their stories by delivering news to their readers in a more interactive way. Although the Times is arguably one of the best papers of its time, it's no surprise that their Flash material is good; however, even the best make mistakes. In the site's feature focusing on *The Real Mayors of New York*, there were both positive and negative aspects of the package.

The main idea of a Flash package is to be interactive. Interactivity is needed to keep readers involved, which is why this quote in the article really stuck out to me. It embodied what being interactive is all about; one of the mayors said, "My community or my village is everyone that I interact with, or everyone that I have an interaction with. My village is huge." Now relating that back to Flash, journalism is huge, so let's call it a village. Everyone delivering the

news and everyone reading it is part of that village and has a role in that community, and in that role, interactivity is a two-way street, just like the two-way communication model. The more interactions you have with people, the more audience a newspaper can generate, which is one of the biggest positives of a Flash package.

Furthermore, with interactivity based on Heeter's operationalization, the complexity of choice available for the content of this story was actually pretty simple. The New York Times decided to choose simplicity instead of complexity for this Flash-package, which is what worked well for this type of story. But with simple design and simple Flash-techniques used, readers and users didn't have to exert that much effort into interacting with this piece, except for clicking the navigation links and videos. I think that's what makes it most enjoyable; No one really likes having to deal with complicated Flash when they want to read about a certain story or topic. However, unlike the example shown in the *Interactivity* PowerPoint, there were minimal links that were incorporated within the story, but each link had some type of relevance to it. Readers have the choice to find out more information if they wanted to.

As far as the responsiveness to the users go, this package catered to them. As stated, "The New York Times asked readers for their favorites and got over 200 nominees." It was all about who readers considered the mayors of their Burroughs to be. So, ultimately, the readers got to decide who would be featured in the article, essentially making them reporters too. By doing this, they were able to facilitate interpersonal communication and could comment on the

article as well. The New York Times also allows readers to read up to 10 articles before needing to subscribe to get more, but because this package was the first article I read, I did not need to log in or subscribe to view its contents. Therefore, there was not much monitoring of information that was needed. Also, because of the nature of the story, it wasn't easy to add information except for the advertisement banner at the top of the page.

Moreover, based on Heeter's guidelines, I do not think that *The Real Mayors of New York* provided a sufficient level of interactivity to its users. It only provided an adequate level of interactivity because simple Flash was used. Clicking links and watching videos doesn't take much effort, so for this project specifically, reader's submissions and comments are the only interactive tools that the readers had available. For readers who want a higher level of interactivity, I recommend other New York Times features such as some of the examples provided in the *Interactivity* PowerPoint shown in class, i.e., The Driving Game. Overall, the package is a stand-alone interactive feature.

Another positive example was how the reporters got their readers involved by making the story relatable to them. Readers were able to participate, submit their votes and decide who the "real mayor" in their area was. Not only does this make it interactive for them, but it also makes it interactive for the people featured and the people who know them. Packages like this are a good way for newspapers to keep up their readership, ratings, relevance and revenue. It is also a

fun way to get more people involved and keep them aware and informed about who's in their community. The descriptive writing and imagery used gives readers a sense of the 'who' and 'where' in the story without needing to know the person or be at that place, and the length of each profile wasn't too long or too short either.

Overall, the design of the package was clean. The simplicity of the black and white photographs gave the story a more personal feel; the pictures were great, and good sources and quotes were used. However, not all of the videos in the package worked; Some didn't load right away and others took too long to do so. Also, for one of the videos, there was a pop-up window that said, "Unable to connect to server. Please try using a different browser or try again later. Click here to learn more." I'm not sure if that's the newspaper's fault, but it was inconvenient. Maybe if the Times would have made the Flash compatible with every browser that would have saved some of my disappointment and frustration as a reader.

Despite that, I think the Times used just the right amount of video coverage; it would have been too much if each mayor had their own video to go along with their story. Also, despite the error messages, the videos and photos worked well with the story and helped to enhance it, something Flash-packages should be able to do. The only thing I didn't like about the photos were the borders surrounding them. As far as the navigation goes, all the clickable links worked. However, the links opened up on the same page; I recommend that the links open to a new blank page that way readers wouldn't have to click the back button to go back to the story. The

navigation on the left side was also useful for readers who wanted to skip around or just read about one person instead of them all. I was glad to see that all of the buttons worked as well, something that could really ruin a package otherwise.

As far as the content of the package goes, the package was complete; it was pretty simple, only including some navigation, photos and video. The title of the page was *The Real Mayors of New York*, which was a good headline because it's what initially grabbed my attention; I was intrigued to find out more. I'm guessing it's a recent article because the comments from readers were posted this month, but I was unable to find a release date, so I'm unsure of when it was created. However, it has been updated with fact corrections as stated at the bottom. Even though the story focused on people from the city, there wasn't one specific target audience because the people featured were a variety of ages, so anyone from high school and above could find something relatable in this article. Overall, the content was balanced, but I do think that there was bias present in what was written about each person.

It's a "feel good" article, so of course nothing bad was mentioned about them, but for the most part, the story seemed to stay objective. I do think that all of the information used was valuable to explain and support the topic as well. The photos and videos backed-up the descriptions of each person and place, and the links provided additional information about things related to the story. The sources provided were also beneficial to the article, but even though all the links worked properly, I didn't like how they did not open up to a new blank page. The only

redundancies present were the boroughs that were featured; It would have been nice to get a Staten Island perspective since Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and Manhattan were featured multiple times.

Overall, usability, presentation and technique are also important when it comes to Flash packages. For this one, it was very professional looking despite the borders around the photos that could have been edited out. But the simple format, and black and white design made the site meaningful and easy to use. The headings for each mayor made the article more organized and the consistency of the simple left-sided navigation made it easy to follow. As mentioned previously, the amount of video coverage and number of photos used were just the right amount of multimedia needed.

I think anything more or less would not have worked with the package. The photography and videos were also great quality, even though one of the videos did not work in the browser I was using; that was the only error about the package. However, since this package was a simple one, there weren't that many Flash techniques used either. I would have liked to see more functions and animations, but I still think the simplicity of the package worked well with the content of the story. The navigation, photos and videos definitely helped me better understand the content, and adding anything else would have taken away from its essence.

Bibliography – Source:

- http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/nyregion/real-mayors-of-new-york.html?ref=multimedia&_r=0